

# Producing “Idolatry:” Indigenous Knowledge Production via Colonial Investigations into Animism, Luzon, 1679–1687

*Nicholas Michael Sy\**

Department of History, University of the Philippines – Diliman, Quezon City,  
Philippines

**Abstract:** The existing historiography primarily discusses the early Philippine experience of Roman Catholic conversion in terms of (a) conversion’s success or failure, or (b) local resistance against colonial hegemony. This article, meanwhile, approaches the confrontation generated by conversion as a process of colonial knowledge production. The concept of “idolatry” was central to this confrontation. I ask: in what ways did indigenous agents help create this concept as it was used locally? This essay examines two late-seventeenth century missionary investigations into indigenous animism. They took place in and around Bolinao, Pangasinan and Santo Tomas, Batangas, both communities in the northern Philippine island of Luzon. Together, these investigations generated interviews with indigenous respondents, whose transcriptions are housed at the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, Spain. Initially, neither the missionaries nor the missionized had a clear idea of what local words, actions, and objects counted as “idolatrous.” Indigenous agents constructed generalizations about their religious beliefs to advance their own interests, to protect themselves from persecution, and to understand indigenous deities within their increasingly colonial reality. The indigenous were not passive gatherers of raw data for missionary ethnographers. They were, in their own right, producers of colonial knowledge.

**Keywords:** Knowledge production, Missionary, Church, Philippines, Early Modern, Spanish Empire, Conversion, Idolatry

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\*Nicholas Michael C. Sy can be contacted at [ncsy1@up.edu.ph](mailto:ncsy1@up.edu.ph). <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2279-3753>.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This essay is a preliminary history of an idea's development. The idea in question is "idolatry." The existing Philippine historiography on conversion tends to look at conversion's confrontation with animism in two ways. The first is in terms of conversion's success or failure. This approach is best represented by the essays of John Schumacher,<sup>2</sup> Alfred McCoy,<sup>3</sup> and F. Landa Jocano,<sup>4</sup> which present opposing points of view. The most recent contributions to this interest include Bruce Cruikshank's "Disobedient but faithful" published in this journal in 2008 and John Blanco's "Idolatry and apostasy in the 1633 Jesuit Annual Letter," published in 2020. The historiography's second approach assumes the colonizer's insidious use of a universalist discourse to draw the indigenous into asymmetric power relations and focuses on the indigenous' use of agency despite these efforts. Vicente Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism* published in 1988 best represents this approach. Schumacher's<sup>5</sup> and Hugh Wilson's<sup>6</sup> critiques of Rafael's book are likewise informative.

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<sup>2</sup> John Schumacher, "Syncretism in Philippine Catholicism: Its historical causes," *Philippine Studies*, 32, 3 (1984), 251–72.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred McCoy, "Baylan: Animist religion and Philippine peasant ideology," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 10, 3 (September 1982), 141–94.

<sup>4</sup> F. Landa Jocano, "Conversion and the patterning of Christian experience in Malitbog, Central Panay, Philippines," in Peter G. Gowing and William Henry Scott (eds.): *Acculturation in the Philippines: Essays on Changing Societies*, (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1971), 43–72.

<sup>5</sup> John Schumacher, "Review of 'Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule,' by Vicente L. Rafael," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 20, 2 (September 1989), 354–55; cf. Vicente Rafael, "Response to Fr. Schumacher's review of Contracting Colonialism," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 21, 1 (March 1990), 272–73.

<sup>6</sup> Hugh Wilson, "Review of 'Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule,' by Vicente Rafael," *The International History Review*, 11, 4 (November 1989), 721–23.

My essay takes a different tact. I approach conversion as a process of knowledge production—a cooperative process that indigenous intellectuals were inextricably part of.<sup>7</sup> I focus on the concept of idolatry. Theologically, it was well established. From a theologian’s eyes idolatry existed in opposition to the true God. In the colonial context, however, idolatry existed more narrowly in opposition to conversion. Detecting and policing it in extra-European contexts required missionaries to assign meaning to unfamiliar actions and objects with less than explicit content.

These missionaries deductively deployed the models at their disposal. In 1667, for instance, the Council of the Indies asked Juan de Polanco, the Philippine Dominicans’ procurator, to evaluate a Jesuit proposal to send a mission to the Marianas Islands. In his report, Polanco assessed the Chamorros’ religious beliefs based on “species” of idolatry identified by Marcus Varro, Augustine of Hippo, and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>8</sup> When the Jesuits finally arrived on Guam, they too began to assess what did and did not count as idolatry. They used Francis Xavier’s letters.<sup>9</sup> These efforts were intensively ethnographic. And they earned the Mexico-based Fray Bernardino de Sahagún O.F.M., for example, the title “father of modern anthropology.”<sup>10</sup>

I approach the concept of idolatry from David Tavarez’s<sup>11</sup> standpoint that in the colonial context idolatry was “a crime of thought... as a legal and social category [it] could only be willed into existence by the concerted action of accusers and suspects... Before indigenous defendants chose to confess... all their accusers possessed were suspicious ritual implements and troubling narratives.” I argue that what words, actions, and objects fell within this category were inductively unclear, at least initially—both to the missionized who were new to the category and to the missionaries who were new to their data. Recent scholarship on the histories of science and of medicine has highlighted the roles of indigenous informants, technicians, and assistants in the production of colonial-era scientific knowledge.<sup>12</sup> In this essay, I look

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Ramos and Yanna Yannakakis, *Indigenous Intellectuals: Knowledge, Power, and Colonial Culture in Mexico and the Andes*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 6–8.

<sup>8</sup> AGI (Archivo General de Indias), Fray Juan de Polanco, procurador general de la orden de Santo Domingo de Filipinas, remite a Alonso Fernández de Lorca el informe que se le pidió sobre la reducción de las Islas de los Ladrones en Filipinas, Madrid, 17 de diciembre de 1667. Filipinas 82-2-55, 14.

<sup>9</sup> ARSI (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu), *Noticia de las Islas Marianas de los años de 1670 a 1671*, Phil. 13, fol. 56–58.

<sup>10</sup> J. Jorge Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson, Eloise Quiñones Keber (eds.), *The Works of Bernardino de Sahagún: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico*, (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, The University at Albany, State University of New York, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> David Tavárez, *The Invisible War: Indigenous Devotions, Discipline, and Dissent in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Pagunsan, Ruel, “Mapping and narrating Philippine waters: Empire and science in the Albatross Expedition to the US colony,” *International Review of Environmental History*, 4, 1 (2018), 93–109; Ma. Mercedes Planta, *Traditional Medicine in the Colonial Philippines, 16th to the 19th Century*,

at religious knowledge and ask: In what ways did indigenous agents help create the concept of idolatry?

To answer this question, I focus on two late-seventeenth century religious investigations. The end of the seventeenth century was the advent of a Philippine golden age of Christianization—a period when missionary optimism combined with a constant inflow of priests from the West to generate widespread and authentic conversion.<sup>13</sup> This age encouraged indigenous devotions. Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod, two indigenous missionary assistants stationed in Japan and in Micronesia, respectively, were martyred. However, even during this period, conversion was difficult to sustain evenly across the colony. In the 1680s, Dominican Archbishop Felipe Pardo launched two investigations into indigenous religious practices: (a) in what was then the province of Zambales north of Manila, and (b) in the municipality of Santo Tomas in the Southern Tagalog region. These two datasets are well known in the historical community, but few scholars have analyzed their contents at length. They recorded the informative testimonies of indigenous agents about their own beliefs.

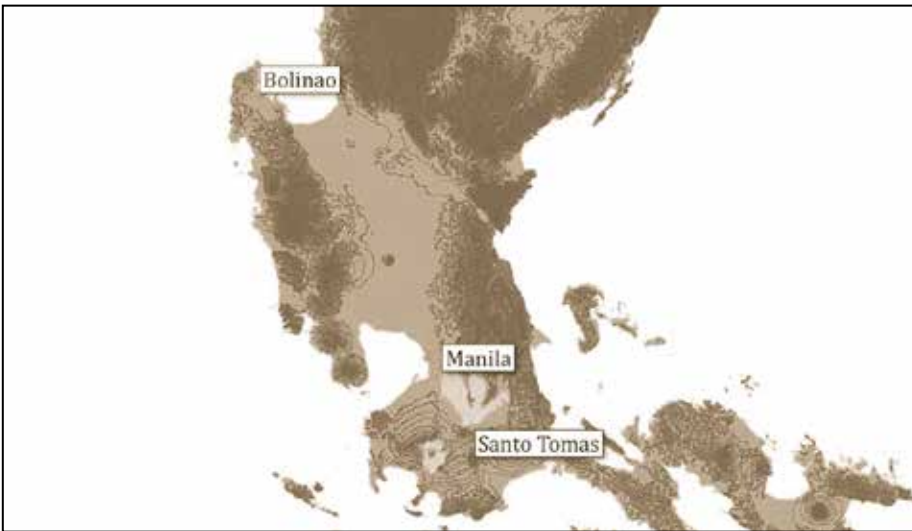


Fig. 1. Locations of Bolinao, Santo Tomas, and Manila using 2017 data. (Philippine GIS Data Clearinghouse, Country Towns and Cities, 2017a; Land Contours, 2017b, Roads, 2017c; Shuttle Radar Topography Mission – Digital Elevation Model, 2017d.)

(Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2017); Kerby C. Alvarez, “Instrumentation and institutionalization: Colonial science and the Observatorio Meteorológico de Manila, 1865–1899,” *Philippine Studies: Historical Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 64, 3–4 (2016), 385–416; Arnel Joven, “Colonial adaptations in Tropical Asia: Spanish medicine in the Philippines in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” *Asian Cultural Studies*, 38 (2012), 171–186.

<sup>13</sup> John Schumacher, *Growth and Decline: Essays on Philippine Church History*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009), 43; cf. Alexandre Coello de la Rosa “Por qué no hubo campañas de extirpación de idolatrías en las Filipinas (siglo XVII)?” *e-Spania: Revue Interdisciplinaire d’Études Hispaniques Médiévales et Modernes*, 33 (June 2019).

### Sources, settings, subtexts

The Zambals are and were an ethno-linguistic group with communities that inhabited the western coast of central Luzon, in what is today the province of Zambales and the eastern third of Pangasinan. Their region was dominated by the Zambales mountain range, which included Mt. Pinatubo.

At the beginning of the 1680s, neither Zambales nor Santo Tomas had yet descended into Serge Gruzinski’s model of missionary-precipitated decay, where “colonial society affected the integrity of idolatry by diminishing its field, partially erasing its references, directly challenging its plausibility” and disrupting the ability of experts to transmit knowledge.<sup>14</sup> These Philippine communities still had religious experts training their successors. They still possessed their icons and ritual instruments. And, although pushed into hiding, they still practiced rituals communally. The Zambals’ many *anito* or local gods included Acasi who healed the sick, Mangalagar whom they invoked for head-hunts, Manglobar who calmed the angry, and five gods who not only ripened rice but also protected it from the elements: Aniton Tauo, Dumagan, Calascas, Calasocos, and Damolag.<sup>15</sup> Their religious arrangements reflected their material anxieties. Headhunting was common, and life among the Zambals could be unpredictably violent.<sup>16</sup> Early Spanish accounts described them as hunter-foragers. By the seventeenth century they supplemented this diet with rice, although it probably remained a scarce and sacred crop rather than a staple food source.<sup>17</sup>

The investigation under study began in 1679. Despite roughly seven decades of Recollect management, Christianity had not taken root. As the Dominicans put it, Zambals still looked at a crucifix and asked “who is that Spaniard and what crime did he commit to end up like that?”<sup>18</sup> The Dominicans gradually took over the province from 1674 to 1679 and managed it until 1712.<sup>19</sup> From 1679 to 1684 they conducted

<sup>14</sup> Gruzinski, Serge. *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries*, translated by Eileen Corrigan, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 151, 173, 178.

<sup>15</sup> Pérez, Domingo, O.P. “Relation of the Zambal Indians of Playa Honda, their situation and customs [1680],” in Emma H. Blair and James A. Robertson (eds.): *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*, (Cleveland, Ohio: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1907), vol. 47, 300–307.

<sup>16</sup> William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994), 251–52.

<sup>17</sup> Aguilar, Filomeno V., Jr., “Rice and Magic: A Cultural History from the Precolonial World to the Present,” *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 61, 3 (2013), 297–330.

<sup>18</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincia de Zambalez. Filipinas 75, N. 23. 1685–88, 28v.

<sup>19</sup> Schumacher, *Growth and Decline*, 36, 60 n. 23; Carolyn Brewer. *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 150–151; cf. Marta Manchado. “Los Zambales Filipinos en la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XVII: Evangelización, Idolatría y

a systematic confiscation of animist ritual instruments. They gathered approximately two thousand instruments from 163 people—mostly women—and interviewed each individual one to six times. A total of 236 transcripts were crammed into bullet points in just thirty-eight pages. Each interviewee was asked only how their artifacts were used and for which animist entities.<sup>20</sup> These brief interviews were the subject of an intensive study by Carolyn Brewer.<sup>21</sup> Brewer focused on gender relations and the asymmetric power relations that structured conversion. In October of 1685, fourteen additional informants were interviewed, this time extensively across roughly fifty pages, in the northern town of Bolinao. This latter batch was the subject of an essay by Marta Manchado.<sup>22</sup> Manchado explained the survival of indigenous beliefs among the Zambals within the context of the missionary agents at work and the structures that constrained them.

The present essay focuses on this latter batch of fourteen interviews, although, as mentioned above, it departs from conventional historiographical approaches to focus on the development of knowledge. These fourteen were conducted by one Nicolás de Vega Caravallo, the *governador en sede vacante* of the diocese of Nueva Segovia.<sup>23</sup> With him were two interpreters, one notary, and two witnesses. They interviewed fourteen people including three Dominicans and eleven *indios*, eight of whom were *principales*. The responses to these interviews were transcribed in the third person. It is unclear whether Vega interviewed his informants alone or in front of their community. It is also uncertain whether or not he used coercion to elicit information. One informant was a prisoner captured for performing animist rites. But at least seven informants, based on their statements, had willingly assisted the

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Sincretismo,” in Marta Manchado and M. Luque Talaván (coords.): *Un mar de islas, un mar de gentes: Población y diversidad en las islas Filipinas*, (Córdoba: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Córdoba, 2014), 147.

<sup>20</sup> Many ritual instruments were destroyed by the Dominicans. At the same time, the Zambals did not surrender all their ritual instruments readily or at once. See Juan Peguero, O.P., “Life, religion and customs of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Zambals, as reflected in the missionary labors of Father Domingo Pérez, OP,” William Henry Scott (trans.). *Philippiniana Sacra* 21, 61 (January-April 1986), 149–151.

<sup>21</sup> Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines*. A short 1983 unpublished paper by Carmen Molina on the “Cases of Idolatrous Practices in the Tagalog Region during the XVII Century” may also have looked into the Santo Tomas case, but I have been unable to locate this work. Other authors make passing mentions of these cases, but usually from the digests produced by chroniclers or from secondary sources. See for instance Schumacher, *Growth and Decline*, 2009, 28–29, 35–36.

<sup>22</sup> Manchado, “Los Zambales Filipinos en la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XVII.”

<sup>23</sup> Nicolás de la Vega y Caravallo was formerly the parish priest of the port at Cavite, who was assigned to Nueva Segovia after the death of its bishop in 1683. Vega managed this diocese until Archbishop Felipe Pardo’s death 1689. Vega then gained an interim *canonjía magistral*. From there he dove into ecclesiastical politics that I describe below. See Alexandre Coello de la Rosa. “Conflictividad capitular y poderes locales en el Cabildo de Manila (1690–1697),” *Colonial Latin American Review*, 25, 3 (2016), 331, 340 n. 6.

missionaries in rooting out of ritual instruments. The interviewers omitted their questions from the transcription, but the varying lengths and contents of each transcript suggest that not all informants were asked the same thing.

At least ostensibly, Archbishop Pardo called for these papers “with the goal of proceeding with the rigor that St. Agustin and Cannon Law instruct as necessary when working against some apostates.”<sup>24</sup> However, both the Zambales case above and the Santo Tomas case below were clearly structured to emphasize the failure of the priests who had previously managed these territories and the comparative success of the Dominicans who replaced them. The Recollects continued to protest the Dominicans’ takeover of Zambales. And the 1685 investigation’s findings of not only religious negligence but also missionary pedophilia, orgies, and sex with pregnant women were calibrated to stifle these complaints.<sup>25</sup> Their data also successfully shielded the Dominicans from the incursions of other rivals. Sent to the king as evidence in a territorial dispute against the Jesuits, they resulted in a Royal Order affirming the Dominicans’ jurisdiction over the Zambals.<sup>26</sup>

The Santo Tomas case, meanwhile, was leveled against the secular clergy, but also implicated nearby Jesuit, Augustinian, and Franciscan territories. The ties of patronage operating in the backdrop to both these investigations are clearest in the Santo Tomas case.

This investigation began unofficially in 1684. Santo Tomas was an inland Tagalog community under the management of the secular clergy. It sat on the western foothills of Mt. Makiling, approximately a two-hour walk by today’s roads from Taal Lake. During the seventeenth century, the town fell under the jurisdiction of Laguna province. Just as with the Zambals, Santo Tomas anitos reflected their believers’ anxieties. Paglingnanlan watched over hunters. Dingsol aided farmers. Guinoong Dalaga, Maguinoong Campongan, and Posor Lupa watched over harvests and seeds. Macatalubhay took specific care of bananas. Siacmatanda helped merchants. Paguaagan managed the winds. Macapulao looked after navigators. Capiro pabalita, Nacapati, and Calagyo watched over travelers. Astapaca took care of married couples. Both Guinoong Pags хотан and La Campinay looked after births. And the latter also managed healing. Lampisaca looked after paralytics. Paalolong was lord of both the sick and the dead, and Balacbac and Balangtay were guardians of the afterlife.<sup>27</sup> Santo

<sup>24</sup> AGI, June 16. Filipinas 75, N. 20. 1686a.

<sup>25</sup> Manchado, “Los Zambales Filipinos en la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XVII,” 150–151, 174; AGI, June 17. Filipinas 75, N. 20. 1686b, 8v; AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincia de Zambalez, 1685–88, 34v.

<sup>26</sup> AGI, June 16, 1686a.

<sup>27</sup> AGI. Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas y otros circunvezinos. Filipinas, 75. Copy found in the Ateneo de Manila Archives Reel 886. 1686c, 27v–28r.

Tomas was an agricultural community that paid serious attention to its harvests. It was also a community at the cross-roads between the provinces of Cavite, Laguna, and Batangas. This meant the frequent traffic of traders and travelers. Some of them settled and married into the community. The baptismal registers of Santo Tomas do not survive, but the registers of the next-door town of San Pablo record a handful *criollo*, Bengali, as well as Chinese parents and godparents.<sup>28</sup> These migrants connected Santo Tomas residents to an intellectual horizon that stretched across the Southern Tagalog. In fact, their testimonies during the investigation implicated thirteen towns across four provinces.

In the 1680s, both the town and region around it were in the middle of a demographic crisis. The region's population shrank from approximately 90 thousand people in the year 1600 to just 65 thousand people a century later. At the root of this decline were the resources and hard labor extracted from them by the colonial government—the Santo Tomas residents will complain about it below. The population was further drained by slave raids that set out from Sulu and Mindanao. And all the above disrupted agriculture.<sup>29</sup> In this environment of high mortality, sickness, death, and the afterlife were the community's constant companions.

During a fiesta in 1684, an anonymous letter was found in the church of the nearby town of Bae. Its author had sealed his letter with a mark in indigenous script and included a curse “that he who did not bring the said letter to the Provincial Governor would not go to heaven.”<sup>30</sup> The letter accused “two or three” *principales* (municipal elites) from Santo Tomas of idolatry. The provincial governor investigated these accusations. However, according to this *alcalde's* testimony, “despite the many and repeated questions that I put to each of them just in case to declare what they knew, they absolutely denied everything.”<sup>31</sup> In retrospect, it is neither surprising that the letter was anonymous nor that the governor's efforts were fruitless. Multiple informants later alleged that the letter's author was an animist. And rumor had it that the Spaniards burned animists alive.

The provincial governor's investigation was the first of three. A second set of interviews was prompted by a woman named Ana Gerónima. She reported Santo Tomas' idolatry to a thirty-five-year-old Dominican in Manila named Fray Juan Ibáñez. She told him that secret gatherings were taking place in front of caves

<sup>28</sup> Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *Bautismos 1672–1796 (faltan años)*. Church records (San Pablo), Film 1084578, 1672–1699. Accessed June 2020. [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org).

<sup>29</sup> Linda A. Newson, *Conquest and Pestilence in the Early Spanish Philippines*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2011), 133–152, 256.

<sup>30</sup> AGI, Carta de Curucelaegui sobre persistencia de idolatrías filipinas. *Filipinas* 13, R. 1, N. 13, 1688.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



along ravines. There *Catalonan* or priestesses danced, spoke to pythons, cured the sick, and foretold the future. So Ibáñez investigated. He essentially trespassed into the territory of the secular clergy. But its post of parish priest was vacant, so he got away with it. After months of ingratiating himself with the locals, he caught a small crowd of animists red handed. He then went from cave to cave accompanied by his followers to destroy ritual artifacts and to cause cave-ins.

Ibáñez was a success. And the archbishop wanted to assign him the parish. He and Ibáñez were close. Both had worked for the local Inquisition. When controversy erupted around Pardo just a few years earlier, leading to his exile in 1683, Ibáñez wrote paper after paper in Pardo’s defense and ended up exiled as well.<sup>32</sup> By late 1684 Pardo was back in power. He was predisposed to support Ibáñez’s project. He assigned Santo Tomas to the Dominicans, whose prelates then assigned it to Ibáñez.

To retroactively legitimize this takeover, the archbishop sent an investigator to Santo Tomas to draw up a report compiling the testimonies of Ibáñez and his indigenous followers. This agent was Domingo de Perea y Roxas, a *clerigo presbítero* from the secular clergy. He was accompanied by two companions with unspecified roles. On paper this choice looked good. Perea was a secular priest assigned to give an objective take on Dominican accusations against the secular clergy. But Pardo was not shy about Perea’s ties with Ibáñez. Pardo called him Ibáñez’s “discipulo en virtud y letras.”<sup>33</sup> Both men were recently part of the Dominican University of Santo Tomas. Their stays there coincided in the early 1680s when Perea was a student and Ibáñez taught philosophy and theology.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Fray Juan Ibáñez de Santo Domingo, O.P. (1651–1704) was a Basque. He arrived in the Philippines in 1671. After finishing his studies here, he taught at the University of Santo Tomas, and later held administrative positions in the same. For a time he was also the Commissary of the Holy Office, and also the vicar of San Juan del Monte. See *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*. “Ibáñez de Santo Domingo (Juan),” in *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*, (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1925), vol. 28, 804; Urbano Asarta Epenza. “Juan Ibáñez de Santo Domingo,” *Auñamendi Eusko Entziklopedia*, accessed July 5, 2013. <http://www.euskomedia.org/aunamendi/71990>; AGI. Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas y otros circumvezinos, 1686c, 8r.

<sup>33</sup> AGI. Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas y otros circumvezinos, 1686c, 39r.

<sup>34</sup> UST Alumni Association. *Alumni directory 1611–1971*, (Manila: UST Alumni Association, Inc., 1972), 1–A; Hilario Ocio, O.P. and Eladio Neira, O.P. *Misioneros Dominicanos en el extremo oriente 1587–1835*, (Manila: Life Today Publications, 2000), 216. Not much more is known about Domingo de Perea y Roxas, the direct author of the Santo Tomas Manuscript. Existing research on the period’s secular clergy would indicate that he would have been a Spaniard, most likely a *criollo*. See Schumacher, *Growth and Decline*, 94; Horacio De la Costa, S.J. “Episcopal jurisdiction in the Philippines during the Spanish regime,” in Gerald Anderson (ed.): *Studies in Philippine Church History*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969), 44.

The former student interviewed his teacher on May 27, 1686. He allowed Ibáñez to speak spontaneously. He then constructed a questionnaire with thirty-six questions that were structured to confirm Ibáñez's statements as well as to elicit additional data. Domingo de Perea asked nine indio informants these thirty-six questions. He transcribed their responses in the third person. All except one of the interviewees were *principalía*. It is unclear whether or not Perea's informants were interviewed alone, but their candid and meandering responses do not suggest that he had employed coercion.

On paper, Pardo then tried to assign Santo Tomas to Perea.<sup>35</sup> This choice would have retained the parish in the hands of the secular clergy. Pardo was shielding himself from the accusation that he favored his own order. Perea, on his part, was no stranger to politics. After Pardo's death roughly two years later, he, Ibáñez, and Vega—of the Bolinao investigation—actively embroiled themselves in a failed attempt to install another Dominican as the archbishop's successor.<sup>36</sup> In 1687, Pardo was still alive. Perea claimed to be too sickly to accept the parish. His refusal cleared the path for his archbishop to assign the parish to Ibáñez.

Finally, the civil government remained unsatisfied with Perea's data.<sup>37</sup> In October of 1687, they began a new set of interviews using the same questionnaire. Six new interviewees were called to Manila. All were *principalía*.<sup>38</sup> They were interviewed by a notary public, along with two interpreters from the *Real Audiencia*. Each interview was transcribed in third person. In contrast with the 1686 interviews, the 1687 interviews produced canned responses. Interviewees either confirmed the questions' content or denied any knowledge about what was asked. These closed-lipped responses suggest that some change had either made the informants wary or had rendered their interviewers ineffective.

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<sup>35</sup> AGI. Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas y otros circumvezinos, 1686c, 39r–39v.

<sup>36</sup> Coello de la Rosa. "Conflictividad capitular y poderes locales en el Cabildo de Manila (1690–1697)," 331, 335.

<sup>37</sup> Judging by the exchange of letters between the Archbishop and the Governor General, Archbishop Pardo had assigned the vacant ministry to the Dominicans without following the due process requiring him to first seek Curuzelaegui's permission. See Vicente Salazar, O.P. *Historia de la provincia de el Santísimo Rosario de Philipinas, China y Tungking, de el Sagrado Orden de Predicadores: Tercera parte... desde el año de 1669 hasta el de 1700*, (Manila: Imprenta de Santo Tomas, 1742), 445; AGI. Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas y otros circumvezinos, 1686c, 39r–40v.

<sup>38</sup> Quintanilla closed the dataset with a final interview conducted without his translators. He interviewed Capitán Don Miguel Sánchez de Villanueva y Texada, the provincial governor who had received the cursed letter in Bae back in 1684. The interview was brief. He asked Sánchez only about first the investigation conducted three years ago.

We can assume that the Dominican’s informants practiced self-censorship in all the above interviews, in both Zambales and Santo Tomas.<sup>39</sup> The interviewer and informants’ relationships (a) as colonial master and colonized subjects, and (b) as representative of God faced with sinners, formed the subtext of these conversations; as much as the rivalries and friendships of Spanish agents formed the subtext of the otherwise religious investigations that prompted them.<sup>40</sup>

<b>Table 1. Interviewees in the Dominicans’ religious investigations in Santo Tomas pueblo and in Zambales province, 1685–1687<sup>41</sup></b>					
<b>Case</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Other details</b>
Zambales	7/10/85	Fray	Joseph Vila Vicario	35	Vicar Provincial of Zambales, Minister of Bolinao, signed
Zambales	9/10/85 10/10/85	Fray	Juan Santos	30	Assigned to all three districts of Zambales over the last 4.5 years, signed
Zambales	10/10/85 11/10/85	Don	Agustín Ferreyra	31	<i>ladino, natural, principal</i> , and former mayor of the pueblo of Bolinao, signed
Zambales	11/10/85	Don	Nicolás Bautista	30	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo Bolinao, signed
Zambales	12/10/85	Captain Don	Gaspar Montoya	30	<i>natural, principal</i> , and current mayor of the pueblo of Bolinao, signed

<sup>39</sup> J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “Sahagún and the Birth of Modern Ethnography: Representing, Confessing, and Inscribing the Native Other,” in Jorge Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson, Eloise Quiñones Keber (eds.): *The Works of Bernardino de Sahagun: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico*, (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, The University at Albany, State University of New York, 1998), 47.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>41</sup> The following details were not used by the interviewer to introduce his interviewee, instead they were mentioned in passing during other interviews: Agustín Ferreyra is called a former mayor by Gaspar Montoya; Luis de Mendoza is called “don” in Nicolás Tino’s interview; and Agustín Cabaltao is called “don” during Bartholome Liese’s interview.

Zambales	13/10/85	Captain Don	Francisco Lubao	63	<i>ladino, natural, principal</i> , and three-time mayor of the pueblo of Bolinao, signed
Zambales	13/10/85	Fray	Juan Fernández	34	Vicar and minister of Masingloc, signed
Zambales	13/10/85	Don	Alonso Sorribuen	36	<i>ladino, natural, principal</i> , and two-time mayor of the pueblo of Bolinao, signed
Zambales	13/10/85	-99	Joseph Calinog	40 approx.	<i>natural</i> of the pueblo of Sigayan in the religious district of Bolinao, did not know how to sign
Zambales	15/10/85	Don	Guillermo Mangalyac	>40	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Bolinao; and resident and <i>celador</i> of the pueblo of Tambac, did not know how to sign
Zambales	15/10/85	-99	Guillermo Calapas	50	<i>natural</i> of the pueblo of Bolinao; and resident and <i>celador mayor</i> of the religious district of Agno, signed
Zambales	15/10/85	Don	Pedro Balacatin	40	<i>natural, principal</i> , former mayor, and current <i>celador</i> of the pueblo and religious district of Masingloc, did not know how to sign

Zambales	15/10/85	-99	Martín Lubao	>30	<i>natural</i> of the pueblo of Masingloc, did not know how to sign
Zambales	15/10/85	Don	Thomás Salonga	60	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Masingloc; and resident in the pueblo of Sigayan, did not know how to sign
Santo Tomas	27/05/86	Fray	Juan Ibáñez	35	<i>Regente</i> of the College of Santo Tomas and its University, signed
Santo Tomas	01/06/86	-99	Ana Gerónima	>30	<i>natural</i> of Tanauan, lived in Santo Tomas for five months circa 1681, did not know how to sign
Santo Tomas	04/06/86	Don	Luis de Mendoza	30 approx.	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, did not know how to sign
Santo Tomas	05/06/86	Captain Don	Agustín Capompon	36	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, signed
Santo Tomas	06/06/86	Captain Don	Nicolás Tino	57	<i>principal</i> , <i>natural</i> of the pueblo of Bae, resident of the pueblo of Santo Tomas for >30 years, and possibly its former mayor, did not know how to sign
Santo Tomas	07/06/86	Doña	María Laña	30	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, did not know how to sign

Santo Tomas	07/06/86	Don	Francisco Manalo	35	<i>principal, natural</i> of the pueblo of Hermita near Manila and resident of the pueblo of Santo Tomas for 14 years, did not know how to sign
Santo Tomas	07/06/86	Captain Don	Miguel de Mendoza	45	<i>natural, principal,</i> and former municipal mayor of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, signed in Tagalog script
Santo Tomas	07/06/86	Don	Antonio de los Santos	35	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, signed
Sto. Tomas	10/06/86	Don	Bartholomé Liese	50	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, signed
Santo Tomas	11/10/87	Don	Agustín Pasqual	45	<i>natural, principal,</i> and possibly former mayor of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, and current <i>celador mayor</i> of Lipa, signed
Santo Tomas	11/10/87	Don	Agustín Cabaltao	45	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, signed in Tagalog script
Santo Tomas	11/10/87	Don	Miguel Caslalao	55	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, signed
Santo Tomas	13/10/87	Don	Francisco Mandanas	43	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, signed
Santo Tomas	13/10/87	Don	Gazpar Mandalas	40	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, signed in Tagalog script

Santo Tomas	14/10/87	-99	Bentura Pagsoyin	32	<i>natural</i> and <i>principal</i> of the pueblo of Santo Tomas, did not know how to sign
Santo Tomas	16/10/87	Captain Don	Miguel Sánchez de Villanueva y Texada	55	former provincial governor of Laguna Province, signed

Sources: AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincial de Zambalez, Filipinas 75, N. 23, 1685–88; AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas y otros circumvezinos, Filipinas, 75, Copy found in the Ateneo de Manila Archives Reel 886, 1686c; AGI, Carta de Curucelaegui sobre persistencia de idolatrías filipinas, Filipinas 13, R. 1, N. 13, 1688.

### Producing “idolatry”

#### *Animism seen within a colonial reality*

It is useful to recognize that these investigations took place in an early-colonial rather than a pre-colonial religious landscape. The missionaries were often ready to absorb indigenous concepts into Christian frameworks, in aid of their subject’s comprehension,<sup>42</sup> even if the missionaries were not always in control of this translation. In Santo Tomas, caves were called the *pinacasimbahan ng mga Tagalog*, the *conventos*, the *pinagmimilagrohan* (“place of miracles”) and the *pinagllobinasan* (“place for novenas”).<sup>43</sup> Visitors to these sites were called “parishioners.” These terms were Christian and colonial. *Pinagmimilagrohan* is an indigenized form of the word “*milagro*” or miracle in Spanish. At the time, the word “*convento*” referred to the Catholic churches of the religious orders.<sup>44</sup> The informant Ana Gerónima was probed for what the Tagalogs expected from the afterlife. According to her, Tagalogs expected that “their souls go to a very large convento like those of Manila, which they called *Tanguban*, and that they are there received by the gods with the melodies and blasts of *harquebuses* and artillery.”<sup>45</sup> She also said that the locals venerated the “god

<sup>42</sup> John Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology and Ateneo de Manila University, 1987), 2nd edition, 74–75.

<sup>43</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas, 1686c, 12r.

<sup>44</sup> According to Fray Juan Ibáñez, the “parishioners” of these caves “held novenas, sweeping and cleaning those places in compliance with the promises that they would make when they find themselves sick.” Strangely enough, these actions resemble the actions of Nahua in Louise Burkhart’s 1989 *Slippery Earth* who also swept as part of their novenas.

<sup>45</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas, 1686c, 13r–13v.

of the Spaniards”<sup>46</sup> as a lesser brother of their gods. In other words, to the people of Santo Tomas, caves and colonial churches belonged together in the same category, and the Christian god and their own gods also belonged together in one category.

The Santo Tomas informants were asked to list their gods. Among the gods they listed were Biro the *teniente* of the gods and Sirit the *alguacil* of heaven. One informant, Doña María Laña, named nineteen entities. She described twelve of them as *abogados*.<sup>47</sup> These words were colonial-era terms for lieutenants, sheriffs, and lawyers. By 1684 the locals of Santo Tomas had been accepting the government positions of *teniente* and *alguacil* annually for at least fifty-one years.<sup>48</sup> And as early as in 1607, a letter to the king described the indigenous as “amigos de pleitos” who went with their lawyers to the Real Audiencia for litigation.<sup>49</sup> Some of this comparison may have been both the interviewer’s and the informant’s effort to make indigenous concepts accessible to their transcript’s readers.<sup>50</sup> However, it is also plausible that by the 1680s, Tagalogs were beginning to see their gods in their own colonial image, that is, living in a society with colonial officials and churches of their own. The extant historiography has noted that early Catholic missionaries and their animist subjects shared enough common ground for the latter to absorb Christian ideas in animist ways.<sup>51</sup> The above data suggest that there was also enough shared ground for the indigenous to see animism in colonial, if not necessarily Christian ways.

### *Clarifying a concept’s boundaries*

From long exposure to the missionaries, the indigenous also constructed generalizations about which of these beliefs constituted idolatry. Given a rumor that the Spaniards burned people alive, parents in both Zambales and Santo Tomas told children never to mention idolatry, and in the latter community, they silenced their children with the threat of “whipping and punishment.”<sup>52</sup> The residents believed their lives were at stake. If someone talked, “their town would be lost.”<sup>53</sup> Every Lenten season, the mayor of Masingloc near Bolinao banned his community from “revealing

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 27v–28r.

<sup>48</sup> Grace Liza Y. Concepcion, “Conflict, Negotiation and Collaboration in Colonial Spaces: The Pueblos of Laguna in the Early Spanish Period (1571–1700)” (PhD diss., University of the Philippines, 2017), Appendix.

<sup>49</sup> AGI, Petición del procurador, 327r.

<sup>50</sup> Klor de Alva, “Sahagún and the Birth of Modern Ethnography,” 48.

<sup>51</sup> Filomeno V. Aguilar, *Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998), 36–38; Charles MacDonald, “Folk Catholicism and Pre-Spanish Religions in the Philippines,” *Philippine Studies*, 52, 1 (2004), 78–93.

<sup>52</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas, 1686c, 21v.

<sup>53</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincial de Zambalez, 1685–1688, 20v.



their sins of Idolatry and Anitos whether during or outside of confession.”<sup>54</sup> When the residents of nearby Balakbak surrendered their ritual instruments to the Dominicans, they asked the missionaries “not to tell those of Masingloc that they had handed over the idols, because they had all sworn not to do so, and if [the people of Masingloc] knew that they had given [their idols] up, they would attack [Balakbak].”<sup>55</sup> Both statements suggest that the indigenous groups enforced secrecy even outside their own communities.<sup>56</sup> The Santo Tomas informants likewise stated that these beliefs were kept secret and that they only ever heard about the beliefs of other towns when drunken visitors let them slip.<sup>57</sup>

The evidence that the missionaries ever burned anyone alive is ambivalent at best,<sup>58</sup> but they did have a track record of rewarding animism with punishment. The Franciscan Fray Diego del Villar detected animism in Lumban, Laguna in 1595. He took “stern, even violent action.”<sup>59</sup> Villar built a bonfire in front of the church and forced local religious leaders to throw in their ritual instruments. The *gobernadorcillo* then had these leaders flogged.<sup>60</sup> Around the year 1637, after three thousand indios went up a mountain in Laguna to practice their beliefs, their leaders were likewise punished.<sup>61</sup> As Schumacher explains, from the point of view of the missionary

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 39v.

<sup>55</sup> Peguero, “Life, religion and customs of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Zambals,” 150. Domingo Pérez, O.P. who was assigned to the Zambals intentionally and successfully let everyone know that he could detect a Zambal’s guilt by the beat of their pulse. It is not clear how commonly used Pérez’s tactics were. Pérez’s biographer Juan Peguero implies elsewhere that Pérez’s credibility was not highly regarded among Spaniards “for everyone knew his passion—or folly—or at least said that his zeal was indiscreet, and others felt that it was hardly prudent.” See *ibid.*, 138, 151.

<sup>56</sup> Records of these indigenous actions and statements survive only through the filter of missionary preoccupations, with little, if any, corroborating external evidence. It is difficult to discount the possibility that the indigenous had other reasons to be secretive. The Balakbak community’s loss of their idols may, for example, have stripped them of spiritual protection, rendering them vulnerable to the aggression of rivals. I would like to thank Dr. Maria Bernadette L. Abrera for this insightful observation.

<sup>57</sup> However, the pueblo’s position along the only convenient land route between the eastern and western halves of the Southern Tagalog region, must have facilitated many such drunken revelations. The informants combined testimonies implicated thirteen more towns in four provinces: Bay, Los Baños, San Pablo, Nagcarlan, and Liliw in Laguna; Marigondon, Indang, and Silang in Cavite; Tiaong in Tayabas; Sala, Rosario, Lobo, and Lipa in Batangas. Conveniently, for Archbishop Pardo and his vendettas, several of these towns were under Jesuit, Augustinian, and Franciscan management.

<sup>58</sup> Casimiro Díaz, O.S.A., *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas, la temporal por las armas de nuestros católicos Reyes de España y la espiritual por los religiosos de la Orden de San Agustín y fundación y progresos de la provincia del santísimo nombre de Jesús de la misma orden*, (Valladolid: Luis N. de Gaviria, 1890), 136.

<sup>59</sup> Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, 73.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>61</sup> AGI, “Act of the council that Sebastián Hurtado de Corcuera convoked [1637],” in Jose Eugenio Borao Mateo (ed.), Pol Heyns and Anna Maria Zanduetta Nisce (trans.): *Spaniards in Taiwan*, (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 2001/2014), vol. 1, rev. ed., 264.

“once baptism had been accepted... stringent measures could be taken to stamp out clandestine paganism in a village... even using corporal punishment on the guilty.” Although he clarifies that “most missionaries preferred to use persuasion or moral authority.”<sup>62</sup>

The existing literature recognizes that the missionaries often had to distinguish between what was religious and what was simply custom. Less apparent though is the fact that the indios also quietly made that distinction for themselves.<sup>63</sup> As missionary persecution heightened indigenous secrecy, the locals probably had to rush to clarify what held animistic meaning and what did not. In a pre-colonial environment suffused with animist spirits there would have been little urgency to make that distinction. However, pushed into secrecy by the fear of being burned alive, parents had to explain the boundaries of their beliefs to their children, that is, what was safe to say and what was not. I suspect that this secrecy led the indigenous to set aside the diversity of their beliefs in favor of functional generalizations that allowed them to know what to keep secret.

### *Ordering diversity*

The *Anito* corresponded to a common Philippine belief in souls—even multiple souls—that could exist separate from one’s body. These souls continued after the body’s death. The living could give them physical representations and, with the help of a specialist, continue to interact with them.<sup>64</sup> Beyond this baseline similarity, the specific *Anito* themselves were diverse. The missionaries in Zambales listed dozens of entities, each linked to specific rituals and instruments. However, they noted that each indio regularly interacted with just one to three entities.<sup>65</sup> One *anito*, Poon, was accessible to only one eighty-year-old woman who was its priestess.<sup>66</sup> Joseph Calinog, an *Anitero Principal*, catered to just twenty-four families scattered across three towns.<sup>67</sup> When asked to verify that the missionaries’ collection of objects were idolatrous, he admitted that he “could not match them all to specific *Anito* because of the difference and diversity of the utensils especially required to celebrate

<sup>62</sup> Schumacher, *Growth and Decline*, 109.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Kenneth Mills, *Idolatry and Its Enemies: Colonial Andean Religion and Extirpation, 1640–1750*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 34–35.

<sup>64</sup> Regulus P. Tantoco, Ma. Bernadette G.L. Abrera, and Dante L. Ambrosio. “Pagbubuo ng kalinangan at kamalayang bayan,” in Rowena R. Boquiren, Ma. Bernadette Lorenzo-Abrera, Ferdinand C. Llanes, and Jaime B. Veneracion (eds.): *Kasaysayang bayan: Sampung aralin sa kasaysayang Pilipino*, (Quezon City: ADHIKA ng Pilipinas Inc. and National Historical Institute, 2001), 63–72.

<sup>65</sup> AGI, June 17, Filipinas 75, N. 20, 1686b, 3r.

<sup>66</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincial de Zambalez, 1685–1688, 20r.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 43r.

rituals with each [of these Anito].”<sup>68</sup> The small scopes of the applicability of these rituals suggest that the locals enjoyed cultures of diversity rather than uniformity.

To the missionaries this diversity was beside the point. The anito were diverse, yes, but there were “four most principal ones called Apolaqui, Anitonduyo, Acasiaga, and Ambing.”<sup>69</sup> Moreover, “although there are many priestesses and *aniteras* they have five principal ones.”<sup>70</sup> The ritual instruments were acknowledged as diverse, but Fray Juan Santos categorized them crudely as: small plates, small bowls, big plates, chalices, pieces of cloth, clothing, small bells, and “other devices.”<sup>71</sup> To them the instruments of one barangay were “of the same kind and quality as the those of the rest of the barangays.”<sup>72</sup>

The indigenous did not always accept the missionaries’ generalizations. The residents of Masingloc asserted that the “diablos” and the dead that they interacted with were distinct: “they distinguished between Anitos, some were demons, and others were the dead, and those who made offerings to the dead did so in the knowledge that they were neither making acts of idolatry nor *Maganitos*.”<sup>73</sup> But these assertions made little difference to the missionaries. Their final report categorized the spirits of the dead along with the Zambal gods as “*idolos*.”<sup>74</sup>

### *Narrowing meaning*

Nevertheless, indigenous points of view were inextricably part of this process of clarification and sorting. The missionaries collected thousands of ritual objects in Zambales, but they had difficulty telling whether an object was idolatrous or not. When the Dominicans made their first excursions in 1676, they solved this problem by converting the nephew of one *anitero* “who knew their customs and idolatry.”<sup>75</sup> The 1682 capture of Joseph Calinog, a ritual specialist, was the mission’s big achievement. Generally, animism was passed on within families, from generation to generation.<sup>76</sup> To become a specialist, however, Calinog learned from a man named

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 43v.

<sup>69</sup> AGI, June 17, 1686b, 6v.

<sup>70</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincial de Zambalez, 1685–1688, 41r.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 27v.

<sup>72</sup> AGI, June 17, 1686b, 3r.

<sup>73</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincial de Zambalez, 1685–1688, 40r.

<sup>74</sup> AGI, June 17, 1686b, 6v.

<sup>75</sup> Peguero, “Life, religion and customs of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Zambals, as reflected in the missionary labors of Father Domingo Pérez, OP,” 127.

<sup>76</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas, 1686c, 16r; AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincial de Zambalez, 1685–1688, 19v.

Mataray who used to live in the mountains. Mataray had given him an anito to cure him of a sickness. Calinog kept the anito and later named it Agatmamaytan.<sup>77</sup>

The Dominicans structured their 1685 interviews first to establish Calinog's identity as a specialist and second to use his testimony to identify idolatrous objects. Various informants were led to say that Calinog was brought along during the confiscations "to uncover instruments in case [their owners] wanted to hide them." He was necessary because "nothing could be hidden [from him] given that he was the *Anitero principal*."<sup>78</sup> Rather than destroy them, the missionaries collected these instruments in their thousands. They sent samples to their archbishop and promised to send the rest when they could so that he might "do with them what you find appropriate."<sup>79</sup> Perhaps these objects had an educational value. Meanwhile, in Santo Tomas, the rich detail provided by missionaries' 1686 informants suggests that they were likewise former animists. María Laña went so far as to recite a prayer for her interviewer "halina mañga nono, tangapin niño ang hain nang yñong mañga apo."<sup>80</sup> Her interviewer translated it as "come grandparents to receive the offerings of your grandchildren." With Laña's help this otherwise benign sentence was flagged as a "song" meant for the "veneration of their Gods." Ibáñez gathered many such animist-informants around him. Ana Gerónima noted that "today those who were the biggest idolaters are his most devoted followers, and they reveal everything to him. Neither by night nor by day do they leave him to rest, telling the said Reverend Father what they know."<sup>81</sup>

Many objects in the pre-colonial and early colonial world, from boats to grains of rice, shared both sacred and mundane meanings.<sup>82</sup> The Santo Tomas case mentioned ritual tools including thread, spools of hair, candles, plates, bamboo cups, knives, stones, small boxes, *bilaos* (large woven trays), trays, guitars, braziers, altars, and stone statues; and offerings including chickens, pigs, tobacco, *buyo* (a chewable mixture made of areca nut and betel leaf), wine, *marhuya* (banana fritter), *suman* (rice cake), *calamay* (rice cake), the hearts and livers of hunted animals, incense, honey, wreathes of flowers, *gogo* or soap, and clothes. Laña added that not only did they "consider their offerings to be blessed. They also considered those trees, rocks, and earth next to the caves sacred."<sup>83</sup>

<sup>77</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincial de Zambalez, 1685–1688, 43v.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 34r.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 47r.

<sup>80</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas, 1686c, 26v.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 14r.

<sup>82</sup> Ma. Bernadette G.L. Abrera, "Banka, Kaluluwa at Katutubong Paniniwala," *Philippine Social Sciences Review*, 57, 1–4 (2005), 29–53; Aguilar, "Rice and Magic: A Cultural History from the Precolonial World to the Present."

<sup>83</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Sto. Thomas, 1686c, 27v.

Faced with the potential ritual value of many everyday objects, the missionaries needed indigenous agents to help them distinguish between the sacred and the mundane. In Zambales they confiscated Chinese plates. The overseas kilns that made these plates considered them dinnerware. In the hands of merchants, they were trade goods. In Southeast Asia they became prestige goods used for ritual alliances.<sup>84</sup> In short, these goods were objects. Their meaning depended on their holder. The Zambals asserted that their bigger plates were used both for their ritual interaction with the anito and simply for eating.<sup>85</sup> The missionary’s confiscation of these plates, however, narrowed the meaning of these plates and gave priority to their ritual purpose.

And the indigenous likewise began to arrive at these narrowed meanings. One day, sixty-four small plates were found buried in the beach by a lieutenant named Don Nicolás Casupong. Casupong determined them to be instruments of idolatry and surrendered them to his municipal mayor.<sup>86</sup> In other words, these plates, although they were objects with ultimately indeterminate meaning, were hidden by their unknown owners because all parties now recognized them as having dangerously idolatrous significance. Buried in the beach they were again just objects. When Casupong found them, he held one up, assigned it a primary meaning, and brought it to the missionary.

### *The masters of none*

Across both Zambales and Santo Tomas cases, Calinog is the only declared ritual specialist interviewed. Why did the Dominicans interview the principalía instead? Why did these informants cooperate?

The archbishop probably chose to have principalía interviewed due to the legal game that he was playing.<sup>87</sup> Petitions written by indigenous elites had a privileged standing within the empire. The law recognized them as the representatives of their people. The Jesuits repeatedly ghostwrote petitions from indigenous elites to win the colonial hierarchy’s approval for transfers of territory into their hands.<sup>88</sup> Archbishop Pardo, in seeking the king’s approval for his own takeover, made sure that he had

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<sup>84</sup> Grace Barretto-Tesoro. “The Changing Meaning of Objects: Calatagan and Archaeological Research in the Philippines,” *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 61, 3 (2013), 263–296.

<sup>85</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincial de Zambalez, 1685–1688, 45v.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 35v.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines*, 179.

<sup>88</sup> Damon L. Woods, “Out of the Silence, the Men of Naujan Speak: Tagalog Texts from the Seventeenth Century,” *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 63, 3 (2015), 303–40; AGI, June 16, 1686a.

testimonies from the *principalía* attached to his petition. In short, these sources of ethnographic information were selected less for their expertise and more for their legal standing.

The motives of the informants meanwhile may have been personal. In the middle of Vega's interviews in Bolinao he paused and said that they could not interview one Doña María Medrana about a Recollect's corruption. The Recollect had attempted to convince her husband, Don Bernardo Bando, to lend María to the Recollect for sex. The Recollect persecuted Bando when he refused. The investigation could not interview María because Bando had, probably eagerly, signed up to be their investigation's interpreter. In short, Vega said that he could not guarantee the interview's impartiality.<sup>89</sup>

Finally, I would like to focus on: Don Agustín Capompon and Don Miguel de Mendoza, two very candid informants from Santo Tomas. Agustín Capompon represented himself as knowing little about idolatry. He had asked his neighbors, but they refused to tell him about it. He explained that this was possibly because his father had been a steadfast Christian who refused to pray to the *anito*, even at his deathbed. Mendoza, a former municipal mayor and *fiscal* to the parish priests, said something similar. Residents were afraid to tell him anything because he had been raised at the parish by its priests. Both men were alienated from their neighbors. These backgrounds did not guarantee Capompon's and Mendoza's cooperation with the colonial order. When the governor first came to investigate in 1684, they were just as uncooperative as their peers. Nevertheless, their statements do reveal a particular type of indigenous informant.

Capompon and Mendoza both held municipal offices. The *Pax Hispanica* prevented elites from ascending politically via the pre-colonial world's inter-polity warfare and offered an alternative career ladder via positions in the civil government. But government obligations in goods and services were onerous. The colony needed ships to meet almost simultaneous external threats from the Dutch, the British, the Chinese, and the Japanese. Lumber acquisition and shipbuilding were placed squarely on indigenous shoulders. In Santo Tomas, residents fled these obligations. According to one respondent, if Ibáñez had not come to their town "given the *corte de maderas*, that were organized for the *naos*, less than twenty houses would have been left as people fled to other parts of the Province of Balayan."<sup>90</sup> The former parish priests were negligent. Mendoza, their own *fiscal*, confirmed it.<sup>91</sup> They were more interested in cattle than catechism and could not stop the flight of their parishioners.

<sup>89</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincia de Zambalez, 1685–1688, 31v.

<sup>90</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Santo Tomas, 1686c, 25r.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 32r.

This inefficacy was a problem for Capompon and Mendoza. Municipal officials were held accountable for their community’s non-compliance.<sup>92</sup> They were invested in the colonial order. It promised returns in terms of political prestige and monetary gain. But without a good parish priest this investment turned sour.

This problem was not uncommon. The Dominicans stationed in Zambales offered semi-quantitative proof of similar mismanagement using the parish registers. The Recollects they replaced were never around, as evidenced by the “many children baptized many days after they had been born.”<sup>93</sup> In 1630, the *Ritual para administrar los sanctos sacramentos*, written by the Augustinian Alonso de Mentrída and published at the University of Santo Tomas, reminded its readers that “the minister is not permitted to delay the baptism of children for long, given the risk that their health suffers at that age.”<sup>94</sup> Parish priests were commonly encouraged to baptize newborns as soon as possible. Baptism was a prerequisite to enter heaven and the period’s infant mortality was high. Historical demographers today likewise use the interval between birth and baptism as an indicator of the quality of the record’s data. The median interval for late-seventeenth century English data, for example, was eight days.<sup>95</sup> Of Bolinao’s seventeenth century baptismal registers, only 264 entries from 27 June 1654 to 13 September 1664 survive. Within this decade, only 216 entries (roughly eight out of every ten cases) record the interval between the subject’s date of birth and their date of baptism. Excluding the two adult baptisms, the median interval between birth and baptism during this period was fifteen days, with just 3.7 percent (8 of 214 cases) falling within an eight-day period. The longest delay was fourteen months.<sup>96</sup> The Dominicans found similar flaws with the parish’s marriage register.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Eliodoro Robles. *The Philippines in the Nineteenth Century*, (Quezon City: Malaya Books, 1969), 66; Luis Ángel Sánchez. “Las élites nativas y la construcción colonial de Filipinas (1565–1789),” in Leoncio Cabrero Fernández (coord.) *España y el Pacífico: Legazpi*, (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal de Comemoraciones Culturales, 2004), vol. 2, 50.

<sup>93</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincia de Zambales, 1685–88, 25r.

<sup>94</sup> Alonso de Mentrída, O.S.A. *Ritual para administrar los sanctos sacramentos sacado casi todo del Ritual Romano, i lo demás del Ritual Indico*, (Manila: Colegio de Sancto Thomas por Thomas Pinpin y Jacinto Magarilau, 1630), 4r.

<sup>95</sup> B. Midi Berry and R.S. Schofield. “Age at baptism in pre-industrial England,” *Population Studies*, 25, 3 (1971), 458. Similar figures can be found for parishes in Spain during this period, although I have not found a study of the same breadth. See Josué Fonseca Montes. “La práctica sacramental en tiempos de la confesionalización: Cantabria, siglos XVII y XVIII,” *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie IV, Historia Moderna*, 21 (2008), 33; Emilio Pérez Romero. “Por qué disminuyó la mortalidad en la España Interior entre 1700 y 1850?” in Francisco Comín, Ricardo Hernández García, Javier Moreno Lázaro; Ángel García Sanz (coords.) *Instituciones políticas, comportamientos sociales y atraso económico en España (1580-2000): homenaje a Ángel García Sanz*, (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2017), 59.

<sup>96</sup> Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *Bautismos 1655–1772, 1776–1784, 1809–1825*. Church records (Bolinao), Film 1088685, 1654–1664. Accessed July 2020. [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org).

<sup>97</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales de la provincia de Zambales, 1685–88, 21r.

In theory, a distracted priest left a gobernadorcillo free reign over his community. But in 1680, one Dominican optimistically noted in that the Zambals “formerly obeyed no one, but now they show great respect to their gobernadorcillos.”<sup>98</sup> Inadvertently, his statement revealed that locals had not, until he showed up, recognized the town mayor’s colonially-granted authority.

Capompon and Mendoza were probably hard-pressed to exert their own authority. During the colonial order’s early years, this authority depended on a fragile mental scaffolding maintained by the order’s primary agent: the missionary. Without him, it collapsed.

The existing literature often talks about the *Ladino* masters of both worlds.<sup>99</sup> And certainly, many of the informants who cooperated with the Dominicans navigated easily between these worlds. The *principalía* who practiced animism continued to benefit from indigenous bases of authority and were said to have “made their living off such practices.”<sup>100</sup> In the area around Santo Tomas, one *sacerdotisa Principal* was named Doña Ana Compain.<sup>101</sup> The informant who identified her noticeably referred to her with the honorific “Doña” reserved for colonial officials and their wives. According to Ibáñez “one of the most prominent people of [Santo Tomas],”<sup>102</sup> a two-time municipal mayor, was himself an idolater.

Capompon and Mendoza, however, were part of a less frequently discussed subset of intermediaries: the masters of none. They represented a section of the *principalía* who, until the coming of the Dominicans, had been simultaneously alienated from their community and cut-off from the colonial order. They happily accepted the Dominicans’ help in regaining control.

## Conclusion

In what way did indigenous agents help to create the concept of idolatry? The two investigations under study show five things. First, the indigenous began to recognize that the missionaries perceived their diverse practices as similar to one another and fundamentally different from Christianity—and the indigenous began to adopt this point of view themselves. Second, the indigenous began themselves to clarify what words, practices, and objects could—despite their denials to the

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<sup>98</sup> Pérez, Relation of the Zambal Indians of Playa Honda, their situation and customs [1680], 326.

<sup>99</sup> Ramos and Yannakakis, *Indigenous Intellectuals*.

<sup>100</sup> Peguero, *Life, religion and customs of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Zambals*, 151; cf. Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines*.

<sup>101</sup> AGI, Sobre la idolatría de los naturales del pueblo de Santo Tomas, 1686c, 38r.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, Sr.



missionaries—fall under this new broader category and what could safely and secretly be excluded. In short, they clarified this concept’s boundaries. Third, whether the missionaries liked it or not, the indigenous saw animist and Christian worlds as resembling one another, and this animist world began to change in shape, adapting to their believers’ colonial reality. Fourth, some indigenous informants shared these innovations with missionaries, although the latter’s framework and priorities circumscribed their comprehension of these beliefs. Lastly, the Spanish empire’s political system privileged *principalía* testimonies during investigations. And, for their own reasons, the *principalía* were ready to participate in the production of knowledge. Romain Bertrand has recently used an inquisitorial trial of a young Mexican-born boy and two Cebu-born indio women to argue that in 1577, “Manila was less a global city than a city of many [conflicting moral] worlds.” The present essay’s religious investigations from a century later, show indigenous agents producing knowledge to help themselves navigate the dangers and opportunities of these worlds.

Recent scholarship on the histories of science and of medicine has highlighted the roles of indigenous agents in the production of colonial-era knowledge. This essay has attempted to contribute to this discussion. It treated conversion as part of a history of developed and transmitted ideas. From the eyes of their institution, missionaries remained the primary gatekeepers and formulators of knowledge. However, this essay showed that indigenous agents were neither simply resistant to that knowledge nor its passive gatherers of raw data. In fact, indigenous agents, acting according to their own priorities, developed categories and ideas that entered the proceedings of colonial investigations.

This essay’s findings raise many questions. Were there other reasons why these investigations mainly interviewed the *principalía*? Outside official investigations, did knowledgeable sources from any status group suffice? Did the conversion process contribute to divisions between indigenous social and status groups? Did it contribute to harmony among them? Did the seventeenth century witness preludes to the dichotomy between the “religion of the learned” and the “religion of the simple people” that emerged during the Age of Enlightenment? Why did the 1687 round of Santo Tomas informants give canned rather than candid responses? Were they trying to misdirect their interviewers? In what other dimensions of life did cooperative and non-cooperative indigenous agents shape the production of colonial knowledge? Did these innovations find concrete shape in church laws, policies, manuals, or dictionaries?

This essay’s findings have many limitations, but I hope that its contribution has at least made these follow-up questions more interesting. **PS**

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